

Cops enforce health codes to shut down drug dens

By Harry Harris

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The cocaine dealers selling out of the filthy East Oakland "crack house" were so brazen they once grabbed a garbage man off his truck and forced him to haul away some of the piled-up refuse.

The same dealers were so bold they warned a city inspector not even to drive down their street.

Police boarded up the dealers' house last week through an innovative program that already has eliminated a dozen blighted houses and is turning into an effective tool against the estimated 1,000 crack houses in the city.

Crack houses are a primary reason the Oakland Police Department has launched "Project Beat Health," an new attempt to cure neighborhood blight throughout the city.

Since the program started in May, crack houses, often garbage-strewn, vermin-infested, and with

illegal utility hookups, have been shut down, boarded up, and in one instance, demolished. Scores more are targeted.

Sgt. Bob Crawford, who with officers Jess Allen and Jim Boyle make up the unofficial blight brigade, said the main reason for the program "is to bring Oakland back to what it was."

Crawford, 50, who grew up in Oakland and has been a police officer for 21 years, said the Police Department and virtually every other city agency are constantly being tipped off to crack houses, usually from angry neighbors.

The police, working closely with the other city agencies and using different ordinances and regulations, then launch a joint attack to get the property owners to shape up or ship out.

"We are now a bureaucracy that speaks with one voice," Crawford said.

Once such a house is identified,

police and such city agencies as the Housing Conservation and the Fire Department, and occasionally the county, join forces.

Housing Department Manager Roy L. Schwyer said the program seems to be "working really well."

"It's good to work with the police and go into certain areas," he said. "It seems like our joint efforts make the work last longer. The people are not going back into the properties as quickly and there is less vandalism," he said.

Crawford said there are several steps taken.

First, the property owner is identified and the status of the people occupying the property is determined.

The majority of the time they turn out to be local drug dealers who are using the properties to sell their wares, oblivious to open sewers and piles of garbage.

Crawford said that usually the

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narcotics dealers don't care that much about their surroundings, but said on at least one occasion in East Oakland a garbage collector was pulled from his truck and under threat of physical harm was made to haul away refuse.

Crawford said when the preliminary "intelligence" gathering has been completed, he and his crew inspect the property with no advance notice.

Obvious violations, such as abandoned cars and excessive garbage, are dealt with right away through citations.

But if there is evidence of rats and vermin and illegal utility hookups, the city has the authority through ordinances enacted in June to take abatement action.

Crawford said he has frequently called Alameda County vector control and on at least one occasion the county hazardous materials division. The dope-dealing property owner found out — at considerable expense — that the garage on his site was saturating the ground underneath with gasoline and other petroleum products.

Usually the property owner has 10 days to correct such problems and can appeal any abatements.

But Crawford said if there is "an immediate health and safety hazard" such as the property being insecure and littered with hypodermic needles and condoms, "we have the authority to

get it done immediately."

That means private contractors are brought in to clean up and board up the property and the property owner fined for the cost, usually between \$600 and \$2,000.

If the problems continue and the property owner refuses to cooperate, harsher measures can be taken, Crawford said.

The most extreme measure is demolition, which has happened once already when the owner did not respond to warnings from the city.

The other, which has not been attempted — although it is allowable under the state health and safety code — is for the city to confiscate the property for up to a year and fine the owner \$25,000.

If the owner still refuses to cooperate the city can sell the property.

Crawford said that so far, all

legal occupants of the houses have been relocated without any problems and there have been no legal challenges.

He said the program has gained the support of a variety of community groups, particularly Oakland Community Organizations, and it is not uncommon for neighborhood residents to thank them once they have boarded up one of the blighted properties.

Gutsy owner retakes 'crack house'

FRI FEB 3 1989

By Harry Harris
The Tribune

A 72-year-old woman, with the help of police, arrested two men who had forcibly taken over her East Oakland home and turned it into a "crack house," officers said yesterday.

Amelia Galindo of Dos Palos made a citizens arrest for trespassing on Byron W. Holmes, 25, and Terrace C. Lillard, 18.

Inside the East Oakland house police found some rock cocaine, two AK-47 assault rifles and two handguns, Sgt. Bob Crawford said.

Galindo notified police about possible wrongdoing at her home at 1158 72nd Ave., after she stopped receiving rental checks from her tenant.

She told police she had owned the house for more than 30 years and until last September had rented it to the same person for 18 years.

That person moved out after finding another tenant who was to pay \$300 a month rent, she told police.

But Crawford said the new tenant told Galindo she had not even been there a full day before

she returned from a shopping trip and found two men in the house.

Crawford said the men told the tenant "the house wasn't hers anymore" and forced her to leave at gunpoint.

It was after the rent checks did not arrive that Galindo, who still works at a grocery store, contacted police. She was put in touch with Crawford, who commands a special unit that uses different laws and ordinances to clean up blighted properties.

Crawford said the Alameda County District Attorney's Of-

fice told Galindo to go to the house and make a citizens arrest for trespassing of anyone living there without her permission.

Galindo went to the house Wednesday afternoon, accompanied by Crawford and other police officers.

Crawford said police also found three pit bull dogs at the house and said the house was littered with dog feces.

Besides trespassing, Holmes and Lillard were also arrested by police for investigation of

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possession of cocaine.

Crawford said police believe there are numerous houses throughout the city where the same situation may exist.

He said if property owners "know this is going on let us know. We can't act as an eviction service, but if people are trespassing we can take action."

He said Galindo now plans to sell the home.

Sgt. Bob Crawford, crimebuster *ill*

MON SEP - 4 1989

CLAIM TO FAME

Crimebusting head of the Beat Health Unit, the Oakland Police Department's weapon against crack cocaine houses in Oakland. Crawford and his unit have swept into more than 100 houses, kicked out drug dealers and addicts and boarded up the dealers' headquarters.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

"Know this: I am personally committed to bringing Oakland back to what it once was, a beautiful, safe and good place to live. I'll call anybody, anywhere. I'll do whatever it takes to get the job done. We're a legal Mafia, if you will."

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

"It really breaks my heart not to be able to do something immediately (when a call comes in.) We have a backlog of 400-500 locations to work on ... and we have limited resources and manpower."

LAST ACCOMPLISHMENT

"Closing down a crack house on Olive Street. There we used the full force of the 1987 Drug Abatement Law. We've cleaned up the location, the house was sold, and the previous owners will pay a \$10,000 fine that will go back to the Beat Health Unit to continue the war on drugs."

CLOSEST ALLY

"My wife. She has always been there for me. Ours was a teenage marriage that's worked for 32 years."

BIO-GRAPHIC

Born Pittsburgh, Pa., 50 years ago. Grew up in Oakland. Attended Durant School and Oakland Technical High School. Entered the Oakland Police Department in 1968 after serving two years in the police reserves. Assignments have included patrol, youth services, communications and training. Married, with two grown daughters.

BY CARMEN RUSCA

Suburban garbage dirties city streets

By Harry Harris
Tribune staff writer

ill

IT COULD COST you \$1,000 to dump on Oakland.

That's the maximum fine for illegal dumping and in the past five days at least 60 people from all over the Eastbay, including upscale communities like Danville, have been cited, with one person going to jail.

It's part of a crackdown by a task force of police and other city and county agencies who believe a clean street is a safe street, said Sgt. Bob Crawford.

Crawford commands the police department's Beat Health Unit, which usually specializes in closing down crack houses.

But the unit is also part of the Specialized Multi-Agency Response Team, which meets every two weeks to address other concerns. SMART also includes the city's Office of Public Works, the Office of Community Development Housing Conservation, Alameda County Environmental Health and Southern Pacific railroad police.

Crawford said the idea of going after people who toss their trash in Oakland neighborhoods instead of properly disposing of it in a landfill "has been a bee in our bonnet for sometime."

He said studies have shown "a dirty city invites crime" because it looks like residents of those areas don't care, which generally isn't true.

The trash can also pose a health problem, such as attracting rats.

It is "personally affronting to citizens to have people from other communities come into the city and dump their garbage," he said.

Crawford said that more than half of those cited so far are from other cities, including Danville, Alameda, San Leandro, Hayward and Castro Valley.

He said some actually told police they considered the locations they were cited at to be "the dump."

They all have court dates of June 27 and have been asked to

It is 'personally affronting to ... have people from other communities come into the city and dump their garbage.'

— Sgt. Bob Crawford

There are at least 10 major areas throughout the city, from the hill areas to the flatlands, whose streets have been turned into unwanted dumps.

They include all of Railroad Avenue and the St. Vincent de Paul Society building on San Leandro Street, both in East Oakland; all of Wood Street near the Southern Pacific property in West Oakland and the Lowell Street corridor in North Oakland.

Crawford said police believe the main reason people don't want to haul their refuse to proper dump sites is because of rate increases at such places.

Over the weekend four sites, including Railroad Avenue and St. Vincent de Paul, were staked out by police and officials from the other agencies.

He said people were observed illegally dumping everything imaginable, from actual garbage to paint, furniture and even a motorcycle. Crawford said when it's reasonable, the people are forced to reload the trash into their vehicles. If that can't be done, a city crew cleans up.

Some of those cited at St. Vincent de Paul tried to claim they were making donations — the society does accept legitimate donations of usable goods.

One man was arrested after he was cited for trying to dump unusable broken furniture at St. Vincent's and then allegedly going right around the corner to Railroad Avenue to dump again, not knowing he was being observed by another stakeout team.

Crawford promised that police would continue their periodic crackdowns on illegal dumpers.

"They're never going to know when or where," Crawford said. "The city wants to make it loud and clear. Oakland is not a dump."